

# **Has childcare become less of a burden in South Korea?**

## **Exploring the nature of pre-and post-reform childcare provision**

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This paper aims to explore whether any changes in institutional settings and the conditions for care practice have occurred in South Korea following a notable policy shift in childcare provision that took place during the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2007). In order to assess the changes, two dimensions of care provision are introduced: affordability and adequacy. Empirical evidence of what has transpired is discussed in the way of data from large scale national surveys and census reports. By comparing changes in employing childcare services on a longitudinal basis for the period 2002 to 2009, the paper critically evaluates the limitations of the policy changes with respect to these two dimensions. The comparison of the changes in the institutional settings and conditions in care practice for each year assist in evaluating where the policy has and has not altered the burden of childcare in Korea.

**Keywords:** South Korea; childcare provision; gender relations; affordability; adequacy; secondary data analysis

### **Introduction**

The partial breakdown of the traditional family structure, changes in demographic profile, and the reshaping of the labor market have demanded that the Korean family-oriented welfare regime be transformed in the early years of the new millennium (Peng, 2009; Sung, 2003; Won & Pascall, 2004). Regarding these changes, a notable policy response in terms of welfare provision occurred during the two presidencies of Kim Dae-jung (1998–2002) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2007). While the Kim government was the turning point for the expansion of welfare through wider provision, the Roh government deliberately attempted to develop specific coordinated policies to address the linked issues of care and the state's responsibility. In particular, being concerned about the rate of low fertility, which dipped to 1.08 in 2005, the Roh government constantly emphasized the significance of childcare by applying the phrase *gonggongsung* (in general terms it means 'the reinforcement of publicly funded and provided day nursery childcare services' in English) when providing childcare

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services, which meant that the state's responsibility for caring for children was to be increased (Presidential Committee on Ageing and Future Society [PCAFS],<sup>1</sup> 2004; The Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee, 2007). Based on this policy directive, relieving the family burden for caring was considered during this government as one of its priorities in policy for the social sharing of responsibility for the burdens brought about by childbirth and rearing children (Korean Government, 2006). Therefore, I aim to explore whether any changes in institutional settings and in the conditions of care practice in Korea have occurred and what these are.

To assess the emerging changes in institutional settings and in conditions of care practice, two dimensions, namely, affordability and adequacy, are outlined and justified. Each addresses an aspect of the changes made for childcare services, firstly, with respect to affording the provision (affordability) and secondly, the extent to which there is satisfaction with the quality of services (adequacy). Having set out these key elements, empirical evidence on what has transpired is discussed using data taken from large scale national surveys and census reports. In the closing part of the paper, by comparing the changes in employing childcare services on a longitudinal basis, the limitations of the policy changes with respect to the two key dimensions of affordability and adequacy are elicited. Discussion on the outcomes, comparing the institutional settings and conditions in care practice for the two years, 2002 and 2009, assists in evaluating whether or not the policy changes have altered the burden of childcare in South Korea.

### **Theoretical underpinnings of gender relations in care provision**

In order to gauge the changes during the time period 2002 to 2009, as mentioned earlier, affordability and adequacy are discussed in the context of gender relations. In this paper, I prefer using the concept of 'gender relations' rather than 'gender.' While the term gender tends to be understood as a dichotomous categorization between individual women and men, the concept of gender relations captures the different opportunities, constraints (OliFFE et al., 2013) and relational aspects of gender embedded within social structures and institutions, such as family, labor market and the welfare state (Connell, 1987; Daly & Rake, 2007; Maharaj, 1995). As the notion of gender is a social practice and not fixed, my concern is to inject the dynamic element of gender into its relational aspects, continually created and reconstituted by gendered norms and social roles. For example, women's roles are likely to be defined either as caregivers or undertaking the dual roles of workers and housewives while in the labor market they tend to be marginalized in certain groups of the labor force and/or by

rather low wage status (Millar, 2006; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). I argue that these varying conditions can bring about different impact on decisions made by men and women, for example, regarding whether to employ care services; do the care work by themselves; or undertake part- or full-time work. Moreover, recent trends in care provision have been shifting towards more marketized forms (Brennan, Cass, Himmelweit, & Szebehely, 2012; Ungerson, 2000) and it is questionable how much this relatively uncontrolled private market will impact the accessibility to care resources and satisfaction regarding their usage (Williams, 2010).

Two concerns center on whether care provision is accessible to those who need the services regardless of their economic situation (affordability) and whether the services provided are adequate and suitable (adequacy). I explore specific elements, arguing which aspect needs to be considered under each dimension, identifying the two levels of institutional settings and the context of care practice. While the former are rooted in structural situations, the latter refers to the conditions under which care is carried out and received. By separating the analysis, their outcomes can be revealed in detail, not only in institutional settings but also in the nature of actual care practice.

First, I argue that, regarding affordability, the purchaser should be able to afford the sources of care she/he envisages availing of from the care market. Having said this, the extent of any changes in government budgets in the institutional setting need to be considered because these enable us to see if the government's financial contribution to overall childcare costs has changed. Further, if there are changes in the contributions made by the state and families, who will undertake the larger burdens? It is also necessary to enquire who are eligible for availing of the services: low income families, working parents, single parents or others? Financial issues, especially those related to mothers' working conditions in the labor market, may be a determining factor for enabling parents to use the services, especially single mothers, who have difficulty entering labor markets due to their care needs. I seek to find out how much of the actual economic burden of childcare costs has been covered, by examining the available data regarding family income, mothers' employment status, children's age and geographical location? In addition, do families decide to use state provided care services and if not, why do mothers give up paid jobs rather than remain employed? Although care-related decisions cannot be explained by one factor alone, the financial burden of childcare costs has been identified as significant for mothers who have to decide whether to work in the labor market or care for their children themselves at home.

Second, with respect to adequacy, the consumers' level of satisfaction with the quality of the childcare service needs to be considered when they purchase it. For instance, most parents may be able to afford some sort of care by drawing on a subsidy given by the government or their employers, but its quality may mean that although some needs are adequately met, others are not. In particular, I argue that the quality of service needs to be considered along with the employment conditions of paid care workers. The poor working conditions of the latter have often been regarded as one of the factors for poor quality of childcare services (Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Ruopp & Irwin, 1979). Likewise, the low wages of employees in the care market in South Korea, mainly in private childcare centers, have been regarded as one of the main factors for poor quality of services (Hwang, 2005; Kim, 2003). Consequently, three indicators have been adopted and applied to assess the data and quality of service: the number of children per teacher by the type of facility, working hours of care workers, and the gap between care workers' salaries in state/public and private facilities. Moreover, this quality dimension is focused on parents' satisfaction when employing childcare services. By comparing attitudes over time, it is reasonable to suggest that we can assess whether a service has been provided adequately and has met the requirements of parents in a suitable manner.

Having explained the two dimensions of affordability and adequacy that are significant for the exploration of gender relations regarding the provision of formal care services in this paper, the conceptual framework is laid out for each dimension, by considering the available data. In Table 1, I specify the key elements that are probed for each of the two dimensions, at the levels of the institutional settings and context of care practice.

>>Table 1<<

### **Secondary data analysis**

Secondary data analysis was employed to ascertain whether there were any changes in institutional settings and the actual conditions under which childcare is provided and received. Two large scale survey data sets from the National Survey on the Attitudes of Using Childcare Services, collected in 2002 and 2009, were employed to provide snapshots of prevailing situations at these points in time. These can be regarded as equivalent data sets, in terms of size and contents. First, the participants in both surveys comprised parents, who employed childcare services, and the facility owners/managers, who provided the services to the market. The survey originally targeted 3,560 households in 2002 and 4,901 in 2009, with a response rate of 95 percent from the targeted households for both of these years, that is,

3,369 households in 2002 and 4,631 in 2009. For the facility owners/managers, the scope of the survey in 2002 included all the childcare facilities in the country, and 14,881 childcare centers, that is, 74 percent of the total number, responded. However, in 2009, the researchers only targeted 10 percent of the total number of facilities, that is, 3,200 childcare facilities.

Second, the survey questionnaire for these two years covered three aspects: households, children, and childcare facilities. The questions on households addressed the general characteristics of members, their economic background and the nature of the co-habitation patterns involving children, parents and others. With regard to children and childcare, the questions were about the parents' experience of using childcare services; their demand for these; the actual provision of the formal childcare services; and, finally, the extent to which informal care was needed by parents despite the availability of formal childcare services through the care market. The owners/managers of childcare centers were asked diverse questions regarding their facilities: about their environment and operation, the training of care workers, and program management, among others. Therefore, by drawing on the national surveys conducted in 2002 and 2009, it was possible to compare the emerging changes through an analysis of the institutional settings of care provision and the care practice, including any shortcomings in these. The statistical results from this enabled me to identify the policy changes during the period, so that further statistical manipulation was not required.

I faced certain challenges while using these national surveys. For example, some of the issues and variables included in both 2002 and 2009 did not match the analytical framework I had developed for this study and the two dimensions it has sought to address. Because of this, I substituted appropriate alternative variables to ensure that my secondary analysis remained robust and fitted the analytical framework. I faced another problem in that some values were not equivalent and could not be compared with each other during the period. Therefore, I had to go back to the original questionnaires employed in the national survey for each of the two years and checked these carefully in order to assess whether the questions were identical and whether it was reasonable to compare them. Sometimes, there was no direct equivalent or the issue had been missed out entirely in the survey, so I used only those cases that were available and suitable for my study. Another concern was that the surveys had deployed different scales to measure the reported outcomes. For example, in measuring satisfaction with childcare services, the Likert scale format used in 2009 was based on a five point scale, while in 2002, a four point scale had been used. Hence, for this reason, I had to seek other data because I wanted to ensure rigorous analysis (Becker & Bryman, 2004), especially pertaining to parental attitudes about employing childcare services. Also, I was concerned

with interpreting all the meanings for each item; therefore, these needed to be carefully translated into English in order to avoid losing their original meaning in Korean. Further, because secondary data can take on a number of meanings for its users, it is often necessary to make some ambiguous terms or expressions clear, and this was an important consideration that had to be addressed (Shamblen & Dwivedi, 2010).

### **The policy backdrop to the reform of childcare policy in South Korea**

It has been acknowledged that welfare provisions in South Korea are based on a 'Confucian welfare regime' as in other East Asian countries, such as Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (Goodman & Peng, 1996). Confucian ideas are understood to comprise a dominant cultural heritage that emphasizes diligence and hard work. In the East Asian countries, traditional Confucian ideas are likely to require women to undertake unconditional obligations in their roles as housewives and/or caregivers in the family rather than become active workers in the labor market (Peng, 2009; Sung, 2003; Won & Pascall, 2004). In a different approach, Esping-Andersen (1999) classified the Korean welfare regimes as 'familialistic' along with the regimes of Japan and the Southern Mediterranean countries of Italy and Spain. He argued that in these countries, when considering the distribution of responsibility for welfare provision by the state, market and family, the lattermost has the most important role. Further, in such countries, the family and household were likely to undertake an extremely heavy burden of responsibility for providing welfare benefits for its members (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Peng, 2009). However, it should be noted here that the households eligible for claiming state welfare benefits were mainly those headed by full-time male workers in the labor market. Under Korea's dualistic employment system, men tend to provide material support for the family by undertaking paid work in the labor market, while women provide care work in the family without any material compensation. Owing to this arrangement, men in South Korea are able to escape actual care-giving by providing material support and delegating the practical tasks to women (Peng, 2009). Hence, these characteristics of Korean welfare provision, which represent Confucian and familialistic orientations, show that the gendered roles of men and women within the family have led their different positions not only in the labor market but also within the welfare state.

The specific gender roles and relations, represented in Korean welfare provisions, were also identified by Lewis (1992) who saw these as being characterized by the norm of 'strong male bread winner,' similar to the regimes of Germany, Ireland, and Japan. The same scholar also noted that private (domestic) work is a crucial dimension of the gendered understanding

of welfare provisions, because historically women have been regarded as having dependent status within families, as wives and mothers. Accordingly, the relationship between unpaid work and paid work is decidedly important in considering the nature of the welfare regime (Lewis, 1992). Moreover, it can be argued that the Korean welfare regime has tended to devolve individual welfare and care responsibilities to households, with a particularly negative impact on women, because there are virtually no alternatives to the family for care delivery. This view is revealed in An's (2008) survey on the time spent on paid and unpaid care work, which reported that married women's mean participation (measured by amount of time spent) in housekeeping was significantly larger compared to that of married men and single women. Moreover, much of married women's unpaid care work appeared to be concentrated on childcare (An, 2008) and the absence of both public and private market sources of care have rendered the family as the only viable site for personal care. Consequently, it can be contended that women have performed much of the care work within the family without being commodified, which means that a woman remains dependent on the male breadwinner in the household when it comes to her rights to receive welfare benefits from the state.

Although gender relations in Korean welfare provision encapsulate certain key features, namely, Confucian and familial orientations as well as ideas about the male bread winner, it should be noted that significant remodeling has been occurring since the late 1990s (Kim, 2006; Kwon, 2002; Peng, 2009, 2011). In particular, the much reduced family/household unit size and the increased number of female-headed households has meant that the traditional role of the family as the main caregiver and welfare provider could no longer be counted upon by the turn of the century. Also, the rising number of the elderly, along with the extremely low fertility rate in the country has stimulated proportionally large budgets for the care of the elderly. The state has been required to maintain all other social security systems while the difference between contributing workers and those making claims has become ever more unbalanced. Finally, while the labor market had become polarized by gender with respect to working hours and work status, an effective work life balance was required. Therefore, the government could not avoid responding to these socioeconomic changes and has expanded state intervention.

These diminishing 'care' functions of the family have been occurring alongside the trend for increased women's participation in the labor market. This particular change has further exacerbated the difficulties in achieving a balance for women working in the labor market and caring for children, while earlier responsibility for this was delegated to family members,

more often than not, mothers. Overall, these social changes have come together and resulted in care-related needs that can no longer be provided by family members, while the responsibility for fulfilling them was handed over to wider society. It has to be recalled that under the family-centered orientation of care provision in South Korea, the duty of performing care work for dependents had been mainly that of women. Thus, the shift away of the responsibility for undertaking care from the family to the state has not only challenged gender roles between men and women, but also demanded reconciliation in the work-life balance of working mothers. In addition, among these demands there was the political interest in the extant and inadequate state provision of care, which was widely described as ‘the lack of care’ by the general public at the time.

With contemporary Korean society having experienced all these socioeconomic pressures, the political rhetoric of ‘social investment’ was newly introduced during the Roh administration. The term was originally proposed in the discourse of “The Third Way” by Anthony Giddens in 1994, which was an attractive and relatively powerful idea for those facing many policy concerns in the Korean government (Kim, Choi, Nam, Lee, & Lee, 2007; Kim, 2003). The concept was often mixed with similar terms, such as developing a social investment strategy and social investment perspective, demonstrating that there was some ambiguity surrounding its precise meaning in the Korean setting. However, its significance in this paper relates to its appropriation for the justification of the expansion of social expenditure, rather than an investigation of its theoretical meaning. Regarding this, the expansion of welfare provision by the state addressed a number of important policy concerns shared by government members that included the following: low fertility, ageing population, need for job creation schemes, support for the services sector, and the matter of gender equality (Kim et al., 2007). More specifically, the expansion of the governmental budget on childcare was often justified by reference to the Third Way discourse, with government publications citing the key ‘buzz’ phrase: ‘fostering our future workforce and excellent children’ (Korean Government, 2008; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2006; PCAFS, 2004; Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee, 2007).

Alongside this drive for a social investment strategy, the demands for care pushed the issue of childcare into the Korean political arena. The Roh government responded in 2004 by fully revising the Childcare Act which had been originally enacted in 1991. This aimed to alleviate the financial burden of childcare costs for parents by providing universal care services as well as to improve service quality in the sector (Baek & Seo, 2004). Moreover, the issue of childcare was identified as a priority national task and the ‘Presidential

Committee on Ageing and Future Society' was established within the Roh administration for the expansion of public childcare and service provision. Subsequently, in 2005, the 'Second Childcare Support Policy' was launched to set the scene for the implementation of childcare policies. With the outline of these two blueprints regarding childcare policy, the Ministry of Gender Equality announced the 'Saessak (it means 'sprout' in English) Plan' in 2006. This report served to reinforce the expansion of public childcare facilities, the promotion of a basic subsidy to parents to support childcare costs of infants (0 to 2 years), which was given to the childcare facility managers via the government, as well as the financial childcare assistance scheme for families on the basis of need and income levels. Moreover, the "Saeromaji (this is a new Korean compound word which means a new beginning and the end of life in English) Plan" of 2006 issued by the 'Committee on Ageing Society and Population,' provided<sup>1</sup> a further impetus to develop childcare systems by increasing the government budget on childcare assistance and facilities. Therefore, the issue of childcare was identified as the main national task and led to a significant change in policy orientation (Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee, 2007).

However, it seems that these responses to the political interest in childcare during the Roh government were not easily realized owing to the structure of the extant market created in the 1990s. At the time, under the governments of Kim Young-sam (1993–1998), Kim Dae-jung (1998–2002), and at the start of the Roh Moo-hyun regime, childcare provision was mainly dominated by private sector establishments, owned by incorporated organizations or individuals who pursued profits (Kim, 2003). These comprised establishments were termed as 'incorporated organizations,' 'center-based individual' and 'home-based individual' providers. Although there were some publicly funded childcare centers operated by the state, local governments, or by various social welfare corporations, termed 'national/public' and 'legal-corporation' facilities, the number of the public centers among the total number of providers in the care market was very small.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, the backdrop against which reform of childcare policy was undertaken appears to have been firmly embedded on a reliance of services provided by the private sector. Moreover, there was loose regulation for monitoring the service quality offered by such private providers. These features underpinned the belief that allowing a free market to operate in the distribution of childcare with minimal state intervention was entirely consistent with the legacy of the previous government of Kim Young-sam. Having set out the relevant socioeconomic factors around the reform of childcare policy and the pre-existing structure of care provision, I now move on to assess whether any changes in institutional settings and in

the conditions of care practice have occurred with respect to the two dimensions of affordability and adequacy.

### **Affordability**

As seen in Table 2, the government budget for childcare services increased dramatically during the reform period (Seo et al., 2009; Seo, Lim, & Park, 2002). The total budget, including central and local funding, has risen more than eight-fold and in terms of direct support for childcare costs, while the allocation has increased more than twelve-fold during the same period. The impact of the dramatically increased budget for childcare services can potentially be identified in the information shown in Figure 1. This reveals that childcare costs in the private sector have declined between 2006 and 2009, especially with the provision of the basic subsidy for infants (0 to 2 years). Figure 2 also shows that the proportion of children with exemptions and reductions for childcare costs in 2006 and 2008 has been constantly increasing, except for the age 5 category in the year 2008.

>>Table 2<<

>>Figure 1<<

>>Figure 2<<

However, these extensions in government subsidies have also led to a higher proportion of private sector facilities being made available. That is, it appears that the government could not avoid utilizing private sector providers, such as incorporated organizations and center-based individual or home-based facilities, which were run to make profits, as presented in Figure 3. These private providers have increased remarkably compared to other non-profit forms of childcare facility ownership (e.g., national/public and legal-corporation). Alongside this expansion of private services, Figure 4 shows the number of children enrolled in the center-based facilities, while home-based childcare centers also increased gradually, nearly doubling between 2002 and 2009.

>>Figure 3<<

>>Figure 4<<

With respect to mothers' working conditions in the labor markets, Figure 5 indicates that more than 60 percent of mothers remained home-makers in both 2002 and 2009. Nevertheless,

the number of mothers who worked as regular employees increased slightly during this period from 14 percent to 19 percent. Moreover, the data reveal that the overall employment rate for working mothers has been increasing during this time. The rate of participation for mothers of infants aged 0 to 2 years old has remained lower than for mothers with 3 to 5 year olds, as seen in Figure 6. The latter increased moderately from 38 percent to 39 percent during this time and the former increased moderately from 24 percent to 29 percent. However, by looking at the number of mothers who used childcare services and at the same time participated in the labor market, it is evident that considerable changes have occurred over the years. In particular, the percentage of employed mothers who used the services went up from 35 percent to 51 percent, as shown in Table 3. The rate of unemployed mothers with 0- to 2-year-old infants also increased more than five times between 2002 and 2009. Notably, the percentage of unemployed mothers with 0- to 2-year-old and 3- to 5-year-old children has risen more than five times, respectively, during the time period (see Table 3). Certainly, there is no intent to explain any direct relation between the reform of childcare policy and any outcome in the mothers' working conditions in these years. The contention here is that married women with children are likely to face difficulty when entering the job market. More specifically, the burdens of care work and childcare costs have been identified as strong influences on their decisions regarding whether or not to participate in the labor market (Budig & England, 2001; Chizuko & Katharine, 2006; Connelly, 1992; Josh, 1995; Joshi, Paci, & Waldfogel, 1999).

>>Figure 5<<

>>Figure 6<<

>>Table 3<<

In terms of financial access to care, the burden of childcare costs has been identified as a significant influence when mothers decide on whether to work in the labor market or care for their children themselves (Connelly & Kimmel, 2003). Table 4 shows the extent to which parents experienced financial pressures when they paid fees, particularly for years 2002 and 2009. Overall, the proportion of parents who reported that they found the pressure 'slightly burdensome' increased during the period from 33 percent to 46 percent, while those who identified the pressures as 'reasonable' decreased from 51 percent to 22 percent. The information about income levels highlights the fact that the response type 'slightly burdensome' among lower and lower middle families showed a gradual rise from 35 percent

to 42 percent while the proportion who answered 'reasonable' decreased significantly. For the groups of upper-middle and upper incomes, the response 'very burdensome' increased remarkably, whereas the percentage of the category, 'reasonable,' declined substantially (see Table 4). This would indicate that during the survey period, the overall burden of paying childcare costs increased steeply rather than being diminished. Furthermore, for both years (i.e., 2002 and 2009), information in Figure 7 indicates that the lower income groups with less than KRW 2,500,000 tended to spend a greater proportion on childcare costs than the higher income groups. The groups of households with somewhat higher incomes had to spend an almost similar proportion as did the highest income band. In general, the different levels of childcare costs for the two years for which the data are presented indicate that expenditure by households approximately doubled for the entire range of income levels. In responding to whether the financial burden imposed by needing to pay childcare costs reduced during the period of enquiry, it appears that there has been scarcely any shift as the lower income groups still tended to spend most proportionally, compared to other groups (see Figure 7).

>>Table 4<<

>>Figure 7<<

With regard to expenditure on childcare in terms of the number of children in the family, geographical region and mothers' employment status, those with more than three children demanded proportionately more expenditure on childcare costs, while it costs nearly twice as much when there was just one child, as depicted in Figure 8. Regarding regional location and mothers' employment, Figure 9 shows that these two factors do not appear to be very significant influences on costs, but the situation for families in big cities appears to be slightly more adverse than in other locations. Moreover, the data for both employed and unemployed mothers in Figure 10 show similar results and there could be a number of explanations for this. For instance, perhaps no noticeable changes emerge in overall family income when the mother is a second earner, or indeed is not working, but regardless, the household still has to expend a similar proportion of its resources on using formal childcare services.

>>Figure 8<<

>>Figure 9<<

>>Figure 10<<

In sum, it cannot be denied that government expenditure on childcare services increased greatly from 2002 to 2009. The increase in state budget may be regarded as the government's intervention to share the financial responsibility for caring for children and, in some instances, it may have made it more affordable for some parents to use childcare services. Further, with respect to the structure of the provision, the number of private childcare centers has increased remarkably, while the number of publicly funded and provided ones has remained almost constant. However, the financial pressure of childcare costs has remained fairly constant during the period under investigation and may have even increased slightly for lower income family groups. Indeed, as a proportion of total family income, these have grown for the full range of household income groups. In particular, the lower income groups still spent proportionally more household income than the higher income ones. Also, in terms of having finances to access services, the employment status of the mother did not appear to have a significant impact on the proportion of income spent on childcare costs. Therefore, the evidence suggests that mothers working as second earners do not receive sufficient remuneration to cover the financial burden of such expenditure. Overall, the outcomes regarding the dimension of affordability at the level of care conditions does not appear to provide what was intended via the governmental improvements and contributions for childcare services.

### **Adequacy**

As mentioned earlier, service quality is explored across three indicators to assess provision: the number of children per teacher/care worker by the type of facility<sup>3</sup>; working hours of care workers; and the differences in care workers' salaries in the varied types of facilities. It emerges that the number of children per care worker has decreased over time between 2003 and 2009 in public and private facilities, as shown in Table 5. Further, in public childcare centers, the figure has fallen from 8.8 to 6.7 children per teacher, representing a reduction of 2.1 per worker. Likewise, in the private childcare centers this has gone down from 9.3 to 6.6 children (see Table 5), which shows a greater reduction than what was found in public sector centers (Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2010). Regarding staff working hours for the years 2002 and 2009 (see Figure 11), it appears that there were no major differences between the public and private childcare centers, with time being reduced in both types of centers to approximately 9.5 hours per day, per person, during this period. Turning to geographical differences, Figure 12 shows that the working hours in small cities were longer than in all other regions in 2002, but by 2009, they had come in line with the hours worked by staff in

other regions. In terms of the payment of care workers across the various types of facilities, the differences in salary increase resulted in a large gap of KRW 450,000 between public and private childcare centers in 2009, whereas the difference was KRW 90,000 in 2002, as seen in Figure 13. Therefore, the wage disparity between employees in the public and private centers appears to have remained. This difference in care workers' wages in public and private facilities contrasts with a reduction in the number of children per teacher/care worker and in working hours. Although there is no evidence confirming that a higher salary for care workers results in better quality of service, the consensus in South Korea is that the low wages of care workers in the private sector can largely be regarded as one of the main reasons for its poor quality services ( Baek & Seo, 2004; Kim, 2004; Kim, 2009).

>>Table 5<<

>>Figure 11<<

>>Figure 12<<

>>Figure 13<<

With respect to parental attitudes towards care services, the data for 2002 presented in Figure 14 reveal that parental ratings regarding the atmosphere in the childcare centers, cleanliness and meals provided, were relatively high compared to other features, for example, the macro-environment, indoor environment and curriculum tools. In particular, satisfaction with the curriculum had the lowest satisfaction rating, indicating that it did not meet with parents' expectations (see Figure 14). The data in Figure 15 shed light on the degree of general satisfaction with childcare services by the types of facilities, mothers' employment and children's ages. Surprisingly, satisfaction with those provided by workplaces was the highest among all the types of facilities, closely followed by home-based individual childcare centers. However, satisfaction with respect to the incorporated organizations and center-based childcare facilities, which represented the largest number in the market in terms of the number of children enrolled in 2002, received the lowest overall rating (see Figure 15). In terms of general satisfaction of parents who employed childcare services (see Figure 16), it appears that, between 2004 and 2009, attitudes became more positive towards the services, but only very slightly, by less than 5 percent and most notably, satisfaction with the cost of childcare remained at the same level, for 65 percent of respondents reporting on this. However, it is clear that the level of satisfaction with the services provided by the national and public type of childcare centers as well as the corporations who provide such facilities for

their workers was still higher than for any other category, such as individual private services, as seen in Table 6.

>>Figure 14<<

>>Figure 15<<

>>Figure 16<<

>>Table 6<<

To sum up, with regard to assessing service quality, it is difficult to find specific measurements for gauging whether this has been adequate and/or appropriate in the context of the institutional settings. Earlier, the working conditions of care workers in public childcare centers and private ones were investigated by using three indicators, which potentially influenced service quality and these conditions have undergone improvement over time. Nevertheless, the gap in staff salary between these two types of facilities has become larger whereas the relatively lower levels of wages in the private childcare centers have been identified as contributing to poor service quality (Kim, 2008). It remains to say that to improve service quality, improved working conditions for care workers should be guaranteed. In fact, the satisfaction levels of parents employing childcare services were very similar after the policy reforms to those prevailing before, with overall satisfaction improving only slightly. In particular, it should be noted that satisfaction regarding costs has remained constant during the observed period.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In this paper, I have explored what has changed at the point when childcare services were finally delivered in institutional settings and regarding actual service conditions before and after the governmental policy reform in this domain. Through the lens of gender relations, in terms of affordability and adequacy, significant findings have emerged. First, regarding the dimension of affordability, the data analysis indicates that there was a definite expansion in the governmental budget for childcare services, in keeping with the contemporary concern about the financial burden of childcare costs on parents. This institutional change potentially provides a platform for recognizing the state undertaking financial responsibility for caring for children. However, it is questionable whether it brought alleviation in the childcare cost burden of parents. In fact, at the level of care conditions, the analysis reveals that the financial burden on lower income groups has remained more compelling, compared to higher

income groups, in spite of increased governmental subsidies given to institutions. As discussed above, this differential access to financial resources and, as a result, different opportunities and constraints should be considered to be part of the relational aspect of gender. In fact, the data points to these financial burdens on childcare, not only leading to a suppression of a work participation rate for mothers, but also an unwillingness or inability to employ childcare services. Indeed, Won and Pascall (2004) claimed that these institutional expansions in childcare failed to bring about a real change not only in alleviating the financial but also the emotional burden of childcare, especially in what is felt by Korean women. I concur with this point and argue that the problems faced by some parents in finding adequate money to access formal childcare services remains unresolved.

Second, the dimension of adequacy addresses the infrastructure put into place to improve service quality. As revealed in this study, there has been an improvement in service quality, in terms of reduction in the number of children per employee and in the working hours of care workers. However, the disparity between the public and private sectors regarding care worker salaries appears to remain constant. The poor working conditions of care workers, combined with low salaries and long working hours, were considered to be key problems associated with poor service quality and, as a result, low levels of satisfaction reported by parents, especially users of private sector facilities. In fact, satisfaction with the care services among parents appears to show no improvement following the reform. Furthermore, satisfaction levels have remained constant, with the individual private sector facilities continuing to receive the lowest score for satisfaction. This lowest satisfaction with the childcare provision in private sectors could bring out the different experiences and constraints in employing childcare services between the public service users and the private service users. These differences should be understood as reflective of gender relations in care provision as the low satisfaction in their use of childcare services in private sectors may eventually have a negative impact on women who have no alternative but the family for childcare, as they have no access to public childcare provision. Recalling the original policy concern regarding improving the quality of the services, these outcomes raise questions about how the substantial governmental subsidies have resulted in little apparent improvement in service quality.

Taking all these points together, it is seen that there has been a definite expansion in institutional childcare arrangements, but this has failed to bring about substantial changes in care conditions. Therefore, although there has been increased governmental expenditure on childcare, in keeping with the spirit of *gonggongsung* enforcing public childcare provision, it

is not possible to claim that the family burden with respect to childcare has been alleviated by the state. This is especially so if we consider the sharing of responsibility for childcare by the state along with the two dimensions of affordability and adequacy.

### **Notes**

1. 'PCAFS' stands for 'Presidential Committee on Ageing and Future Society'. This organisation was established in October 2003 as the presidential advisory panel which aimed to predict future socioeconomic changes and to improve people's lives as well as develop state capacity. Later on, it was reorganised under the name 'the Committee on Low Fertility & the Ageing Society' in 2005 with a new legislation passed in June 2005, 'The Basic Law of Low Fertility & the Ageing Society.'
2. There are two more kinds of childcare facilities; one is the parental cooperative type run by parents' groups and the other is the workplace type, owned by employers and run for their workers, located in or near the work place. However, these made up a very small proportion.
3. Although for parents, the child-staff ratio may not be an important concern when deciding to select a particular service, amongst academics, this has been considered as one of the most readily gauged indicators as a control for service quality (Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992).

### **Notes on contributor**

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#### Abstract in Korean

본 연구는 한국 노무현 정부 (2003–2007)의 보육정책 개혁 과정의 전후를 중심으로 실제 부모들의 아동부양 부담에 대한 변화가 있었는지를 젠더관계의 두 가지 측면에서 논의하고 있다. 첫째, 부모들의 아동보육 비용이 얼마만큼 완화되었는가에 대한 부분이다. 아동보육에 대한 전반적인 정부 재정지출의 확대와 더불어 가구 소득별 부모들의 보육서비스 비용에 대한 부담이 줄어들었는가와 그로 인해 보육서비스 이용 여부에 미친 영향들을 논의하고 있다. 둘째, 부모들의 보육서비스 이용에 대한 만족도 부분이다. 특히 민간 보육시설에서의 낮은 서비스 만족도 부분을 고려해 봤을 때 지난 보육정책 개혁을 통해 국공립 보육 서비스 이용자와의 그 만족도 부분이 어느 정도 개선되었는지를 개혁 전후를 중심으로 비교하고 있다. 본 연구를 위해 2002 년도와 2009 년도에 한국보건사회연구원을 중심으로 조사된 ‘보육실태 조사’ 보고서와 보건복지부 보육통계 자료를 본 연구의 2차 자료로 사용하였다.

**Keywords:** 노무현 정부; 아동부양부담; 보육과 젠더; 젠더관계; 보육실태조사

Table 1. Analytical framework: two dimensions of care provision through a gender relations lens

Institutional setting <sup>1</sup>		Care practice <sup>2</sup>
<i>Economic resources</i>		<i>Financial access</i>
Affordability	Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expenditure</li> <li>• financial breakdown</li> <li>• subsidies</li> </ul> Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ownership (public/private split)</li> <li>• service requirements</li> </ul> Opportunity cost <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• women's labour market situation</li> <li>• employer's contribution</li> <li>• government benefits (e.g. pension credit or tax relief)</li> </ul>	Care decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• factors influencing decisions</li> </ul> Actual financial burden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the financial burden</li> <li>• how much is the actual payment</li> <li>• the carer's employment</li> </ul> Actual demand and coverage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by women's employment status and children's age</li> <li>• between urban and rural areas</li> <li>• special needs</li> </ul>
<i>Service quality</i>		<i>Care attitude</i>
Adequacy	Service regulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training formal carers</li> <li>• programme management</li> </ul> Service assessment and monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who and how to assess</li> <li>• what is assessed</li> <li>• recommendation enforcement</li> </ul>	General satisfaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cost</li> <li>• transportation</li> <li>• delivery</li> <li>• informal care support</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> State based provision structure

<sup>2</sup> Actual care practice: the conditions under which care is carried out and received

Table 2. Governmental budget (central and local) spent on childcare in 2002 and 2009

	Unit: million won		
	2002	2009	Index
Support for operation and maintenance of facilities <sup>1</sup>	221,668	785,584	▲3.5
Direct support for childcare costs <sup>2</sup>	208,144	2,669,242	▲12
Reinforcement function of care facilities	5,175	41,978	▲8
Other <sup>3</sup>	1,916	76,807	▲40
Total	436,903	3,573,811	▲8

<sup>1</sup> This contains the support for personnel expenses, transportation, teaching materials, aids and so on.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the costs of the graded subsidy, free childcare for 5-year-old children, and the support for disabled children.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to instalment of infrastructure, assessment of the service facilities, and support for children who do not use the service.

<sup>4</sup> Data from the two sources for the two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 72); Seo et al. (2002, p. 91)

Table 3. The rate of childcare service use according mothers' employment status, 2002 and 2009

Unit: %

	Mothers of 0- to 2-year-old children		Mothers of 3- to 5-year-old children		Total of childcare service use	
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed
2002	30	4	39	25	35	15
2009	51	23	51	48	51	36
Total	41	14	45	37	43	26

Note: Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo, et al. (2002, p. 132); Seo, et al. (2009, p. 115)

Table 4. The extent of the burden of paying childcare costs as reported by parents

Unit: %

Income level <sup>1</sup>	Income range <sup>2</sup> (KRW10,000)	Very Burdensome		Slightly burdensome		Reasonable		No burden	
		2002	2009	2002	2009	2002	2009	2002	2009
Lower	Below 99	28	18	40	45	24	18	-	20
Lower middle	100-199	11	14	35	42	49	22	1	23
Middle	200-299	7	20	39	49	48	19	3	13
Upper middle	300-399	4	20	29	48	60	18	6	15
Upper	Above 400	-	10	18	48	71	30	12	12
	Average	9	16	33	46	51	22	4	16

<sup>1</sup> Having taken into account that the minimum living cost in 2009 was KRW 1,327,000 per month for a family of four (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2010), when deciding on these income bands, I had to respect the income ranges used in the original survey data sets. They are therefore divided into: lower, lower middle, middle, upper middle and upper categories.

<sup>2</sup> The groupings for family income have been re-categorized in order to allow for comparison of the two data sets.

<sup>3</sup> Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002, p. 278); Seo et al. (2009, p. 274)

Table 5. The number of children per care worker by facility type for 2003 and 2009

		Unit: number	
Facility type		2003	2009
Public	Average number of children per care worker	8.8	6.7
	National /Public	9.5	6.7
	Legal corporation	8.1	6.6
Private	Average number of children per care worker	9.3	6.6
	Incorporated organizations	9.4	6.6
	Center-based individuals	9.2	6.5
Workplace		8.3	5.2
Home-based individuals		5.8	3.8
Parental cooperatives		-	4.8
Average number of children per care worker		9.5	5.7

Notes:

1. There is no data available for 2002.
2. Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (2003; 2009)

Table 6. General satisfaction levels of parents across the range of childcare centre types for 2004 and 2009

			Unit: five point scale
Facility type	2004 <sup>1</sup>	2009	Total average
National/Public	3.61	3.73	3.67
Legal corporation	3.70	3.71	3.71
Incorporated organizations	3.66	3.93	3.80
Center-based individual	3.55	3.61	3.58
Home-based individual	3.54	3.81	3.68
Parental cooperatives <sup>2</sup>	-	4.40	
Workplace	3.69	3.99	3.84
Average satisfaction level	3.59	3.68	3.64

<sup>1</sup> Data were converted into a five-point scale in the survey report for 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The parental cooperative childcare centre type was institutionalised only in 2005.

Note: Data from the sources for the two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009)

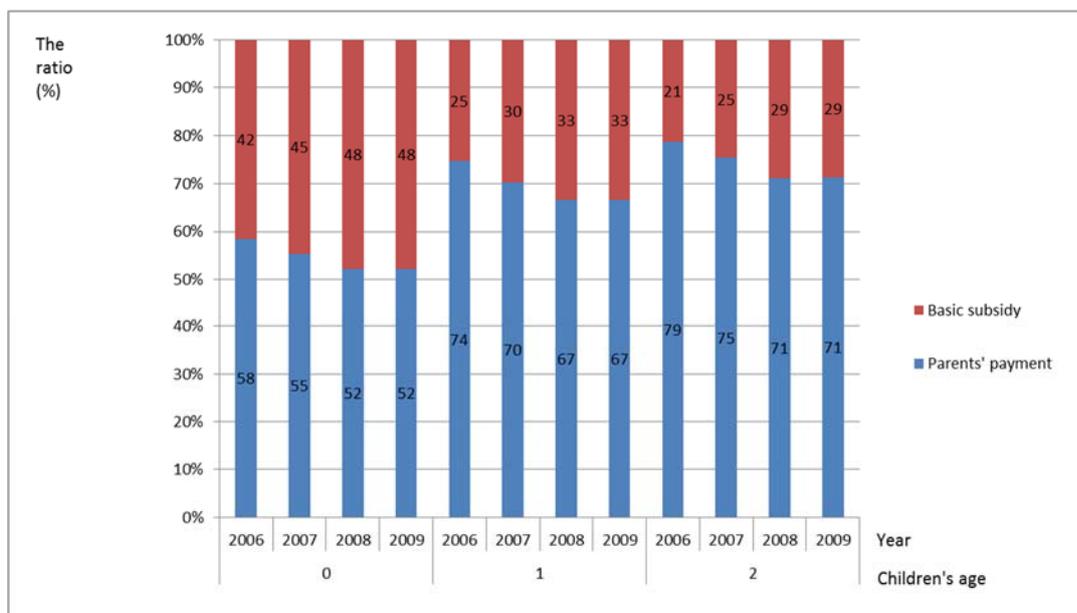


Figure 1. Composition of childcare costs in the private sector from 2006 to 2009, by age of child (0–2 years old)

Notes:

1. The data only include infants (0 to 2 year old children) as the basic subsidy was started with support for meeting the cost for children who are between zero and two years.
2. Data from the sources for each year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 65)

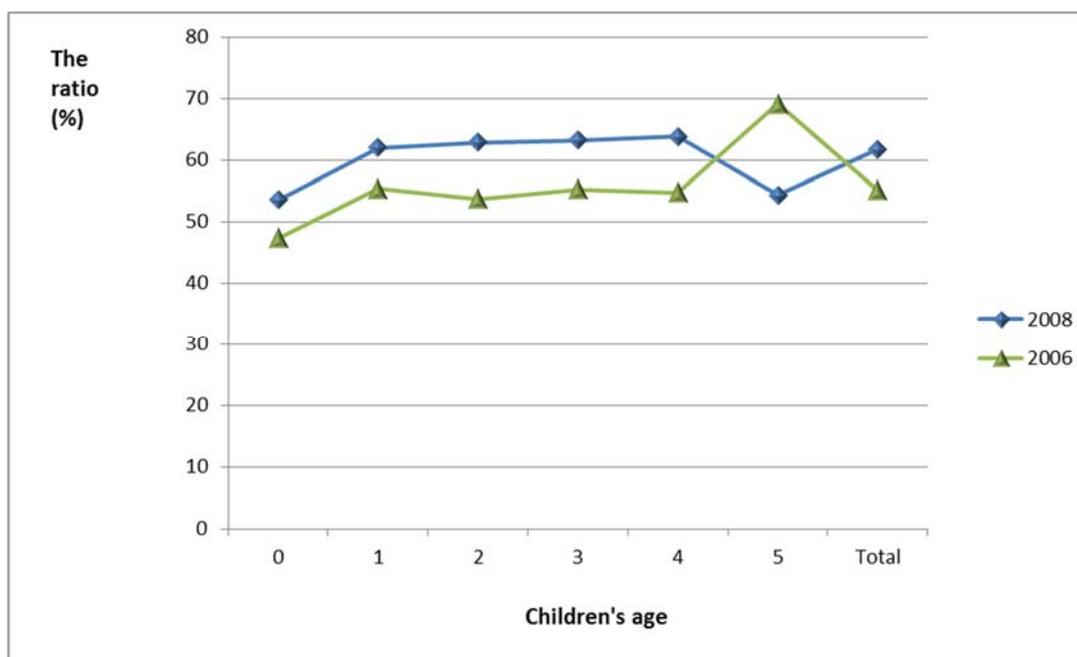


Figure 2. Proportion of low income families' children covered by the graded subsidy for 2006 and 2008

Note: Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 69)

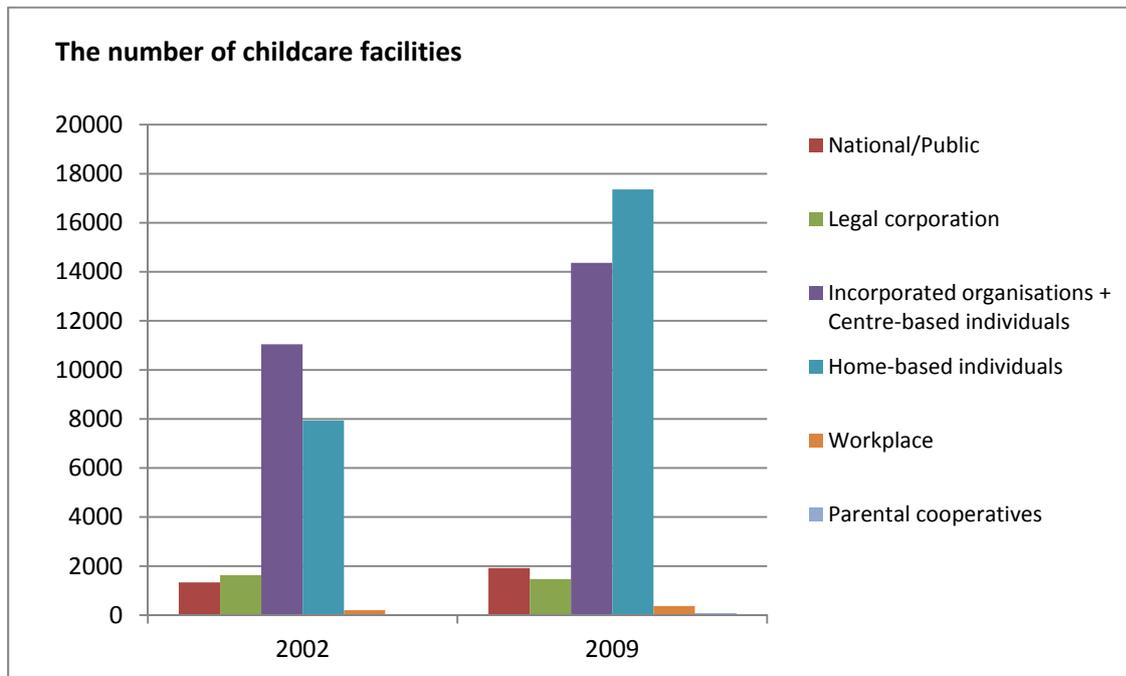


Figure 3. Number of childcare facilities by type of ownership, 2002 and 2009

Notes:

1. The parental corporative type was not categorized until 2004 and its institutionalization took place in 2005.
2. Data from the sources for the years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (2011)

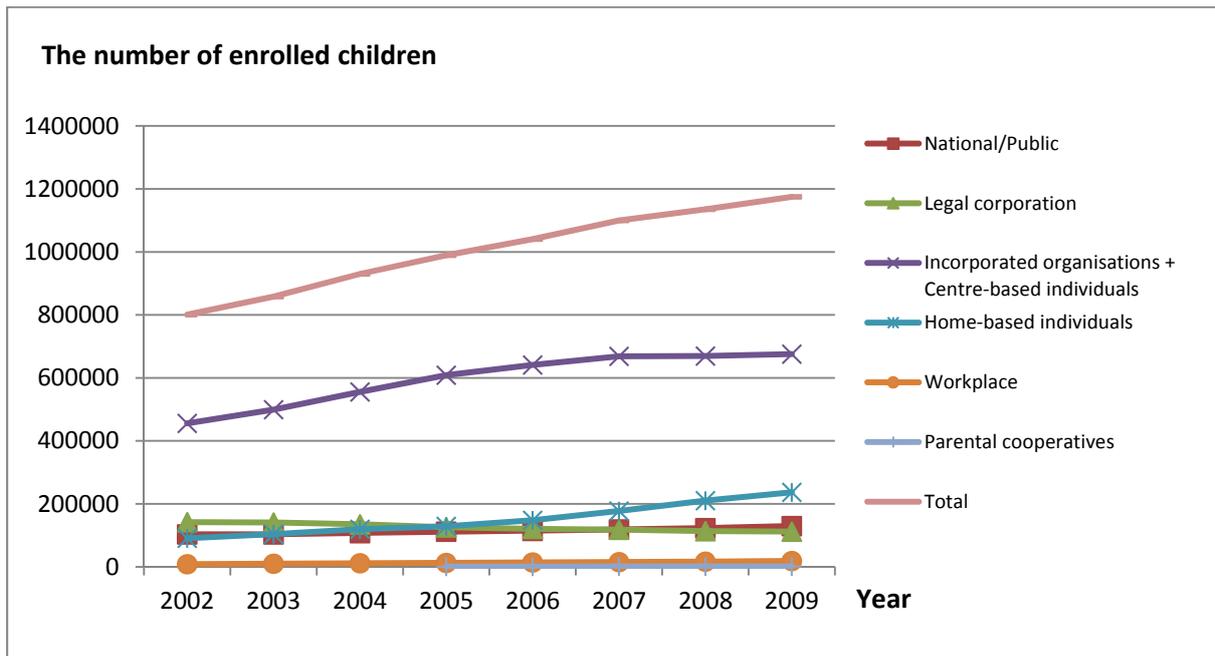


Figure 4. Number of enrolled children by type of ownership of childcare facility, between 2002 and 2009

Note: Data from the sources for each year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (2011)

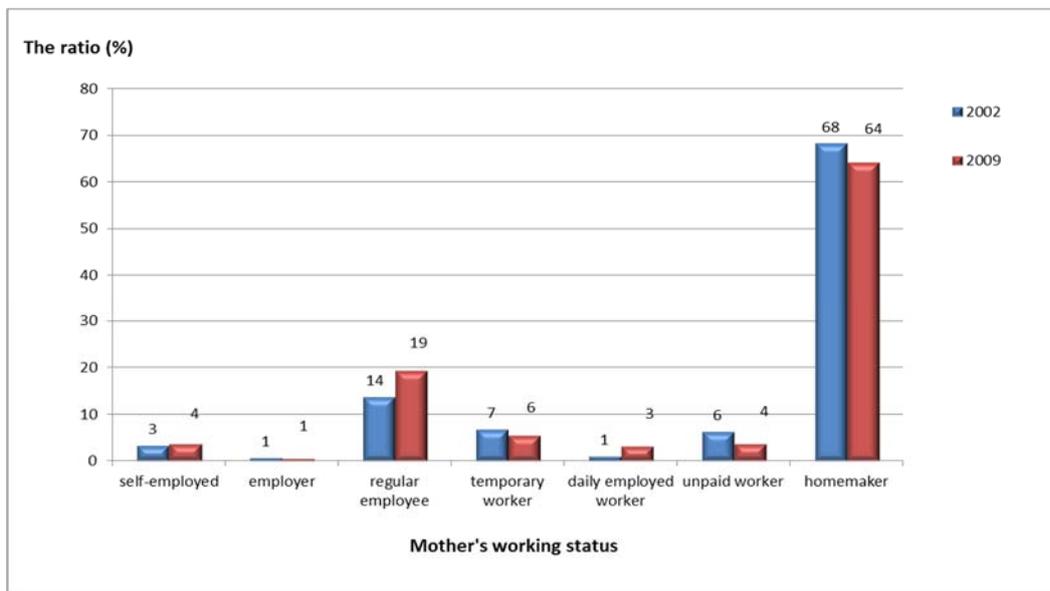


Figure 5. Mothers' working status in the labor market, for the years 2002 and 2009

Notes:

1. The information was calculated using the data sets of 2002 and 2009.
2. Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002, p. 119); Seo et al., (2009, p. 93)

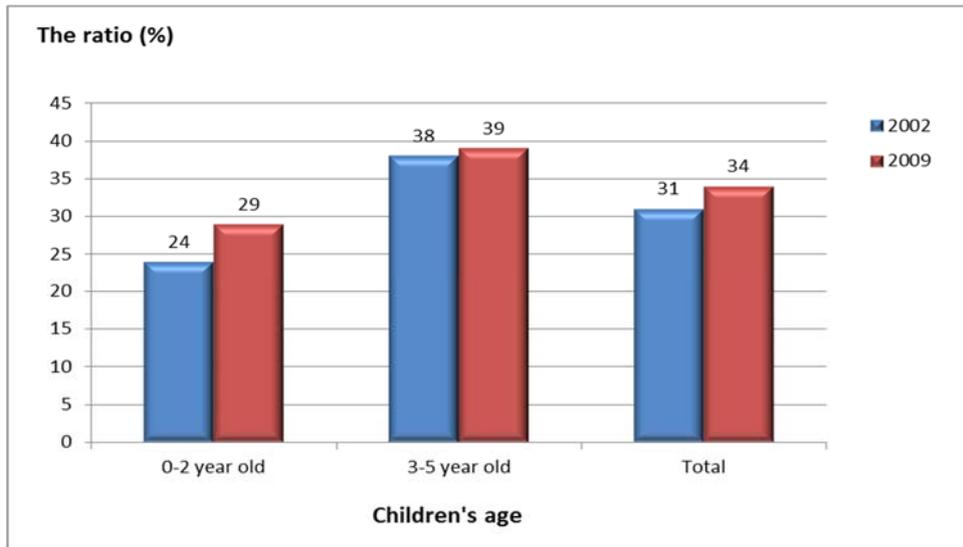


Figure 6. Mothers' employment rates according to children's age, for 2002 and 2009

Notes:

1. 'Total' shows the rate of mothers' employment rates over all the age groups of children (from 0 to 5 years).
2. Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p.90)

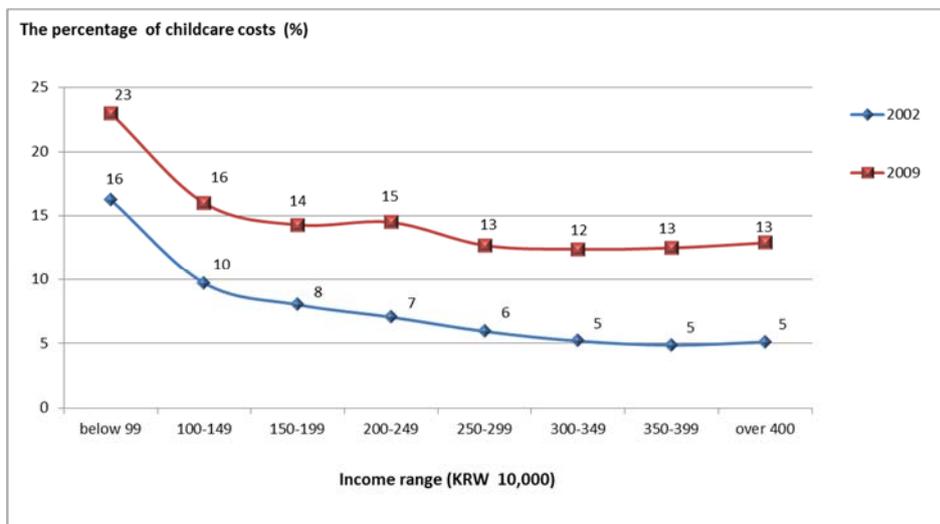


Figure 7. Childcare costs as a percentage of household incomes for the years 2002 and 2009

Note: Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002); Seo et al. (2009)

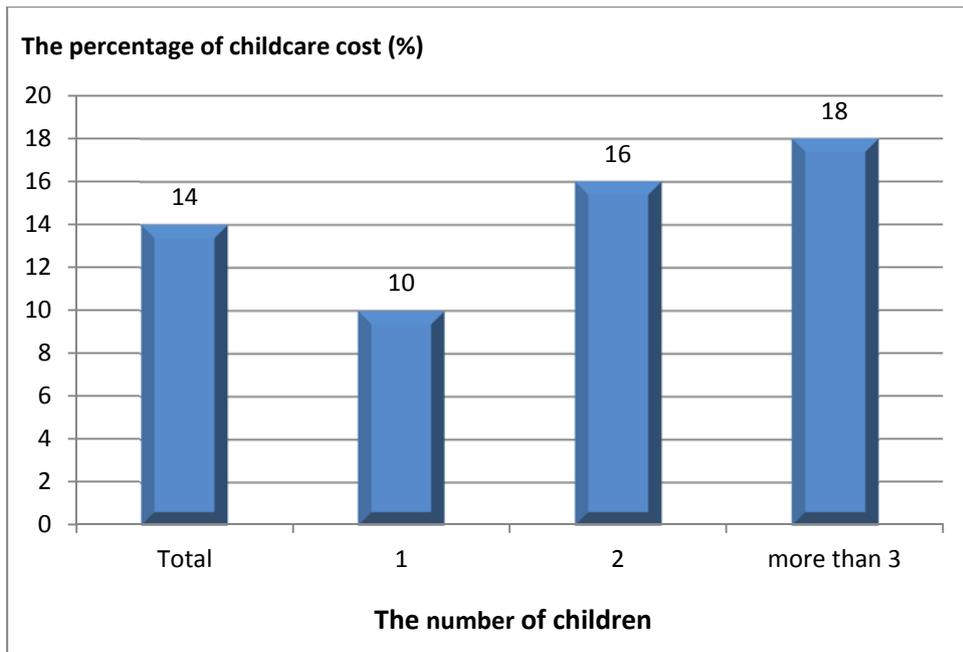


Figure 8. Childcare costs as a percentage of household incomes according to the number of children in the family in 2009

Note: Data from the sources for the year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 143)

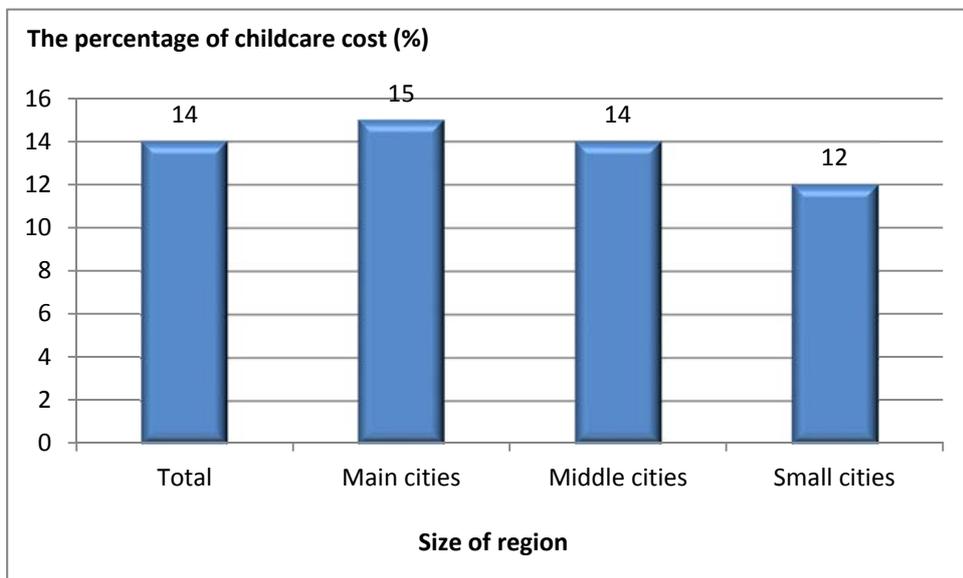


Figure 9. Childcare costs as a percentage of household incomes according to geographical region in 2009

Note: Data from the sources for the year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 143)

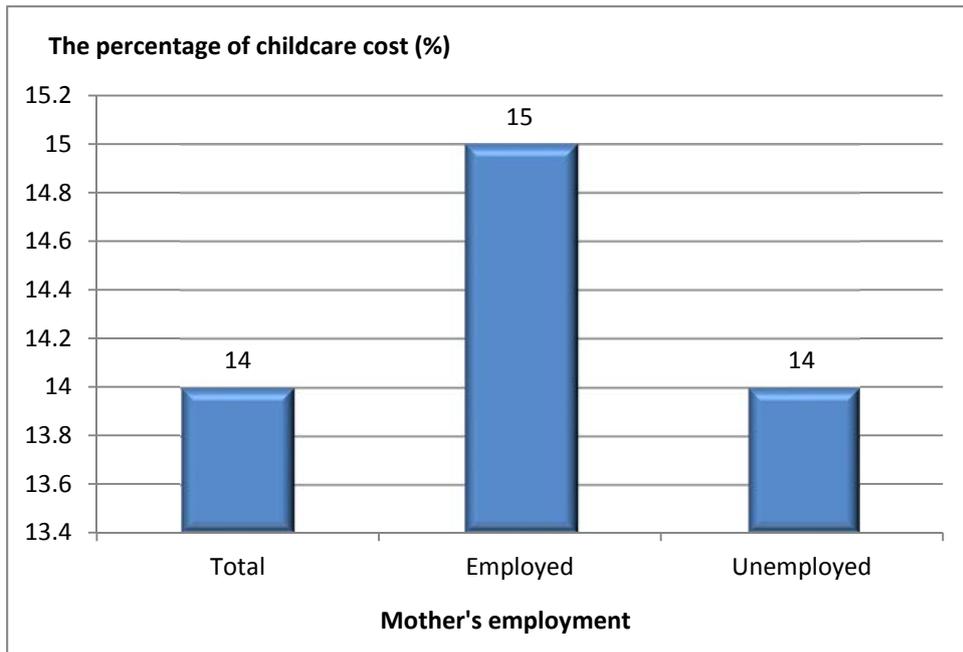


Figure 10. Childcare costs as a percentage of household incomes according to mothers' employment status in 2009

Note: Data from the sources for the year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 143)

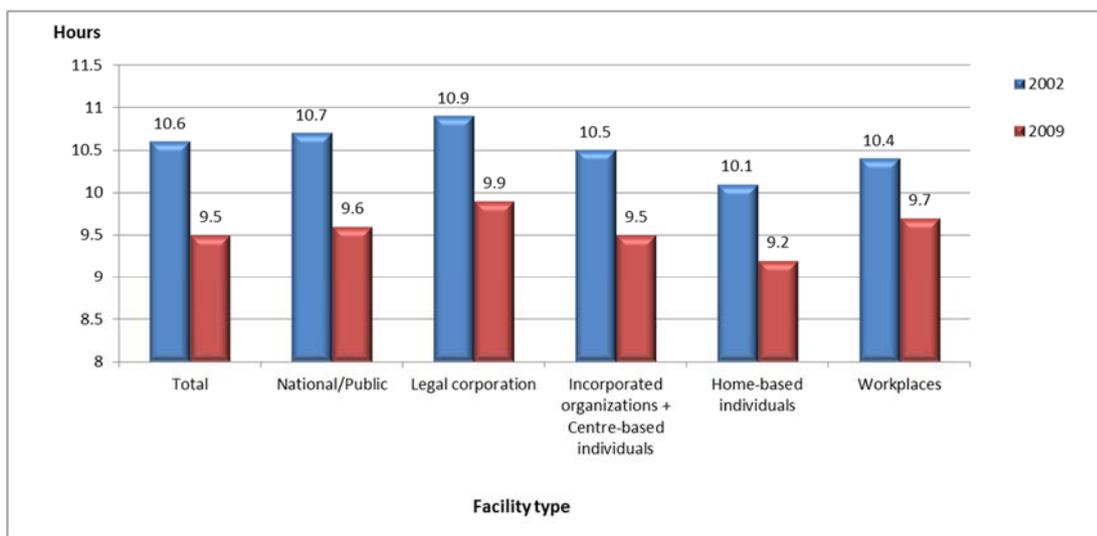


Figure 11. Working hours per day for care staff by facility type for the years 2002 and 2009

Notes:

1. For comparison between 2002 and 2009, the parental cooperatives in 2009 are added to the category of 'Incorporated organizations + Centre-based individuals.'
2. Data from the sources for two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison by the researcher for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002, p. 295); Yoo et al. (2009, p. 189)

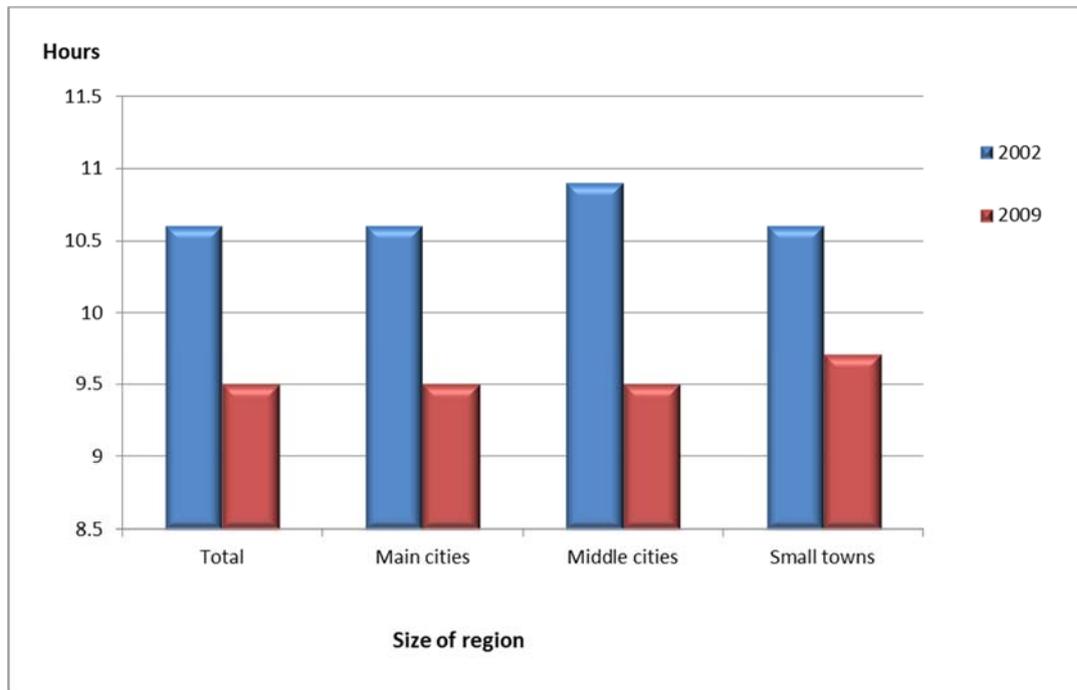


Figure 12. Working hours per day of care staff by region for 2002 and 2009

Notes:

1. There are several indicators used to categorize the size of a region, for example, the size or density of population. The surveys do not clarify how they approach regions but generally in South Korea the main cities have more than a million inhabitants and middle sized cities have more than 50,000.
2. Data from the sources for the two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002, p. 295); Seo et al. (2009, p. 326)

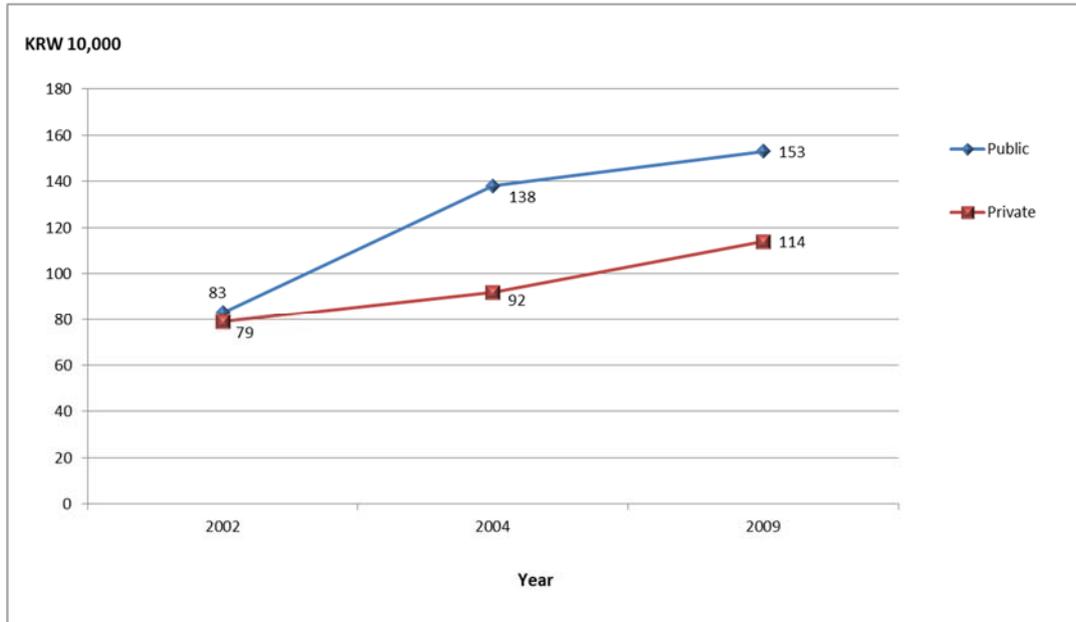


Figure 13. Changes in care workers' salary payments

Notes:

1. The type 'home-based individual' is included in the private figures, while 'workplace facilities' are excluded from this data.
2. Data from the sources for each year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002); Seo et al. (2009)

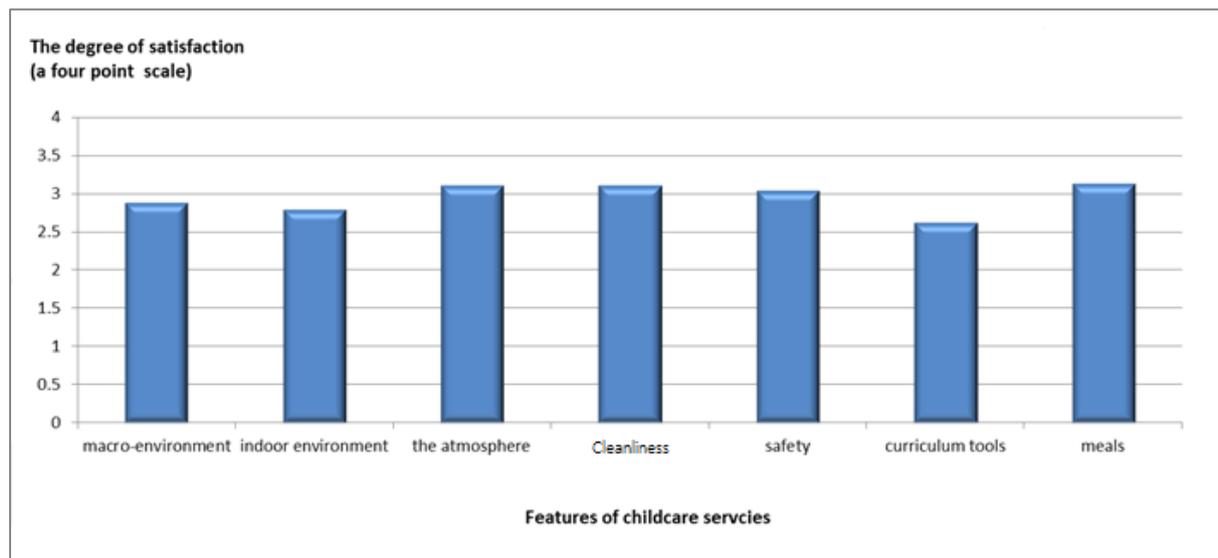


Figure 14. Parental expressions of general satisfaction regarding the features of childcare services for 2002

Note: Data from the sources for the year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al, (2002, p. 259)

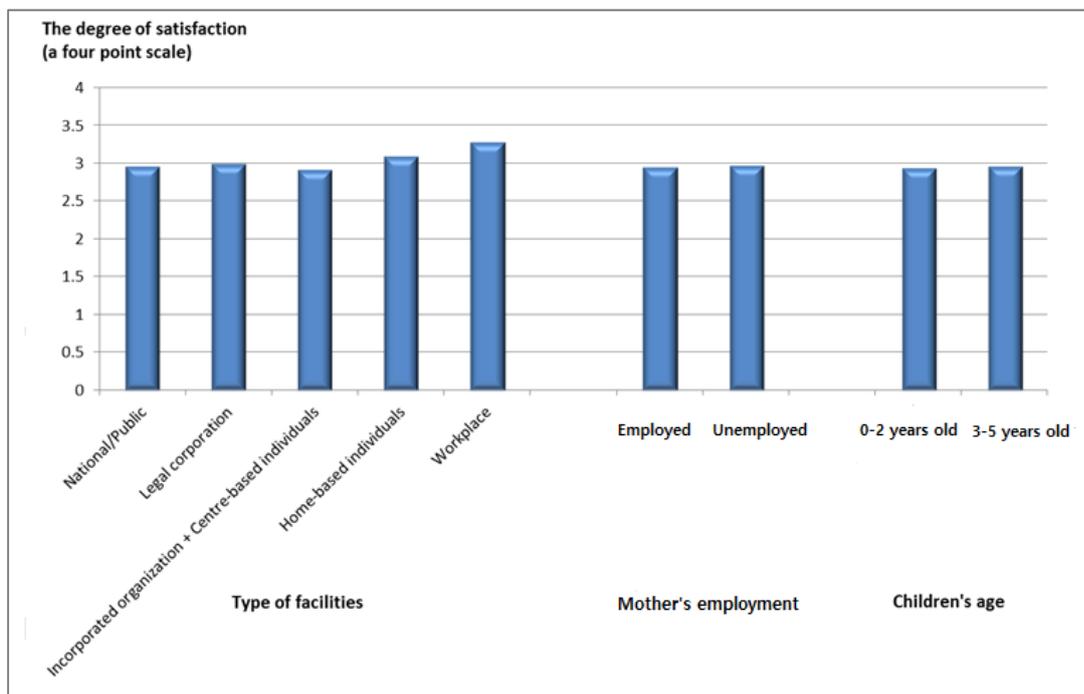


Figure 15. Parental expression of general satisfaction by type of facilities, mothers' employment status and children's age in 2002

Note: Data from the sources for the year have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2002, pp. 259, 261)

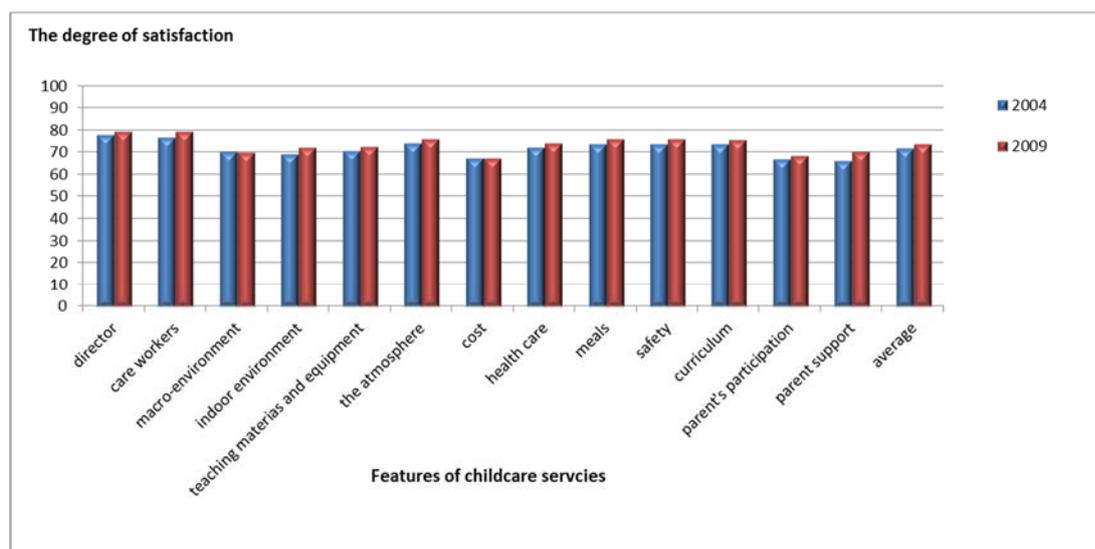


Figure 16. Parental expressions of general satisfaction regarding features of childcare services for 2004 and 2009

Notes:

1. The degree of satisfaction for both focal years was fully calibrated and published for comparison purposes in the survey report in 2009.
2. Data from the sources for the two years have been extracted and presented as a simple comparison for the purposes of this paper.

Source: Seo et al. (2009, p. 283)